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ABSTRACT

This monograph draws similarities and contrast between two basic types of communication programs currently being used to facilitate better relations between foreign students and American students. One program discussed is the sensitivity training approach. It is discussed in terms of its goals, techniques, role of the leader, and appropriateness for the foreign student. The other approach, intercultural communication workshop, is analyzed in the same manner. The burden of the paper is to show that the nature of each approach limits its usefulness for a specific group. The sensitivity approach is felt to be of doubtful use in a setting involving persons who are not accustomed to a penetrating search into their own personalities. The workshop on the other hand is deemed more useful with participants who are inclined to deal with reality from a cognitive perspective as distinct from an affective one. A short bibliography is appended. In addition, ED 040 632 is a related document. (CWB)

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HUMAN RELATIONS TRAINING AND FOREIGN STUDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Considerable concern has developed over the participation of foreign students in the human relations training programs taking place with increasing frequency on American campuses. Are sensitivity training programs a way of increasing contact between American and foreign students? What is sensitivity training? Is it dangerous? What is the difference between a sensitivity training group and an intercultural communications workshop? Should foreign students be discouraged from participating in them, or should they be left to decide for themselves? These are some of the questions that are being asked, and which we will try to answer in this paper.

Human relations training programs are gaining in popularity at the same time as increasing attention is being given the problem of relations between American and foreign students. It is not surprising, therefore, that the idea of including foreign students in human relations programs has received much attention. Human relations training programs [which have many names, including sensitivity training, T (for training) groups, encounter groups, group dynamics programs and intercultural communications workshops] are seen as a way of breaking down the barriers which commonly exist between individuals, allowing them to know themselves and each other better. If one of the aims of having foreign students on American campuses--that of having American students learn something from them about their countries and cultures--is being frustrated by a lack of contact between the two groups, why not bring them together in human relations training programs which will help break down the barriers between them? The idea seems to be a good one if the program is especially designed to take cultural differences into account. Some human relations training programs are so designed and some are not. In the following section we shall attempt to distinguish various kinds of human relations training programs.

VARIETIES OF HUMAN RELATIONS TRAINING PROGRAMS

General Characteristics

The different kinds of human relations training programs have a number of characteristics in common. The first, obviously, is that they are concerned with relationships among individual human beings. Another is that they rely on the experiential approach to learning. In contrast to the cognitive approach, which stays on the intellectual level and usually depends on lectures or reading to convey information, experiential learning seeks to involve people both emotionally and intellectually by having them learn from experiences in which they themselves are involved.

Human relations training usually takes place in small groups. A circle of chairs is nearly always to be found when a human relations program is in progress. Participants are expected to learn from their discussions and interactions with each other in the group.

Finally, there is a "trainer" playing the role of catalyst and/or synthesizer and perhaps part-time participant. The role of the trainer varies according to the type and goals of the program, as we shall see below.

While they have in common the general characteristics we have described, human relations training programs are of various kinds. They vary according to their goals, the methods by

which those goals are to be achieved, and the dynamics of the groups involved (see chart on page 6). For the purposes of this paper we will distinguish between two contrasting kinds of programs: the sensitivity training group and the intercultural communications workshop. The sensitivity training group (or T or basic encounter group) is the more intensive, more personally involving and less structured; and the intercultural communications workshop is the less intensive, less personally involving and more structured.

The Sensitivity Training Group

As the reader knows if he has participated in a T group and tried to explain the experience to one who has not, it is not possible adequately to convey in words what a T group (or any other kind of human relations training program) is unless both parties to the conversation have had the experience. (This is because communication requires not just the use of words with commonly accepted meanings, but also a common frame of reference within which the words are to be interpreted.) We will therefore not attempt to explain here just what happens in a T group.* We will simply isolate a few of its distinguishing aspects. We are talking about sensitivity training groups of the kind associated with the National Training Laboratories in Bethel, Maine, or the earlier days of the Esalen Institute in California.

The goal of the sensitivity training group is personal change or "personal growth." The participant in the T group receives uninhibited "feedback" from the other participants; that is, they tell him freely and frankly what they feel about him, or how they respond to him. The participant can use this information to understand himself better and if he wishes, to change his behavior.

This kind of personal interchange is of course extremely engrossing. Few people can avoid becoming very much personally involved in a T group.

The T group's trainer exercises little overt direction over the group's discussion. Instead, the group is allowed to find its own way. Leadership fluctuates among the members. They may consider many topics as they proceed, but after spending long hours together, and after hearing many suggestions and questions from the trainer relating to the interpersonal relations developing among them, the participants will focus on their own interactions with each other. (The trainer's suggestions and questions serve, in a subtle way, to direct the group.)

From a T group a participant can gain increased self-knowledge and self-awareness; an improved ability to listen (an important and rare ability, it might be noted); an increased sensitivity to other human beings; and an increased concern for the quality of human relationship. Other things can be learned as well, depending on the participant and the others with whom he shares the experience. A foreign student has the opportunity in a T group to see that Americans do have feelings, emotions and personal thoughts. Many foreign students never see that, given the American proclivity to be "cool" and keep personal

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*Sensitivity groups have been described in print. See for instance Leonard, George B., "The Man and Woman Thing," Look, (Vol. 32, No. 26), December 24, 1968; and Weschler, Irving R. and Reisel, Jerome, "Inside Sensitivity Training Group." Monograph Series 4 (University of California, Los Angeles, 1960).

feelings from being expressed in the presence of others.* Learning that Americans are "real people" can be very stimulating and reassuring for foreign students.

A T group can be "modified" by the trainer (using particular exercises, or making particular kinds of comments) to produce learning about other subjects, such as group dynamics (leadership patterns, participation patterns, and so on) or "team development" (how a given group of people can best work together on a given task). The kinds of T groups which have received the most sensational publicity are those oriented toward "sensory awareness" or "body awareness." Such groups focus on the participants' physical and physiological responses and modes of communication. They involve exercises calling for physical expression of behavior (as opposed to verbal), and sometimes entail nudity.

Are T groups dangerous? One can hear stories which will lead him to believe that the major product of T groups is psychological collapse. There have been incidents of mental breakdown in T groups as there would be in any emotionally stressful situation. Certain kinds of people—those who have reason to be very defensive and those who are or have recently been receiving psychiatric care—should not participate in T groups. In addition to having its participants screened, a good T group will have an experienced trainer capable of handling strong emotions. The better T groups are generally those which last at least one week (weekend groups are increasingly coming into disrepute) and which involve participants who are together not just for the T group but who will be working together on some task following the group's close.

With these precautions, sensitivity training is not "dangerous." Occasionally participants remain disturbed about the experience for some time afterward, but most people are quite resilient and able to withstand psychological strain. They generally know when they should, for their own good, withdraw from a discussion. They profit far more often than they suffer from participating in a sensitivity training group.

It has to be emphasized at this point that the sensitivity training group is a very culture-bound institution. The concerns with which it deals and the ways in which it deals with them are related to distinctive aspects of "modern" Western culture. Since its culture-related aspects are quite important in considering its suitability for foreign students in the United States, we will elaborate on them at some length.

First, a sensitivity training group presupposes that its participants see themselves as independent individuals. Americans learn as they grow up to see themselves as independent, decision-making entities. Orientals and Africans, on the other hand, usually do not; instead, they see themselves as parts of groups of people, such as families or tribes, and are less prone than Americans to focus attention on themselves as separate identities. For persons lacking the individualistic outlook of the typical American, the T group and what happens in it does not easily make sense.

Second, the T group presupposes that its participants have egalitarian sentiments. They have no formal leader, and each of them can participate in decision-making for the group. There is extreme informality. These are conditions in which many non-Americans will feel quite ill-at-ease, since they are accustomed to seeing in any social situation a hierarchy based on,

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* See Lloyd, Donald, "The Private Mind of the American." Updated mimeographed paper prepared for a Peace Corps Philippine Training Project, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania.

say, occupation or age. (Some Americans are ill-at-ease in an unstructured situation too, but, unlike many non-Americans, they can usually comprehend those who are at ease.)

Third, the T group uses as its main technique face-to-face confrontation among the participants. Americans have many phrases for this kind of interpersonal interaction—"Let's get down to brass tacks," "Let's lay our cards on the table," and "Sock it to me!"—and although they do not always act with frankness toward each other, they can usually be induced to do so. Many non-Americans, by contrast, cannot. They often place a higher value on politeness than on frankness, and it is only with the greatest difficulty, that they can bring themselves to deprive another of "face"—if indeed they can do it at all. The face-to-face confrontation is literally and figuratively half a world away from the Oriental pattern of going through an intermediary to iron out interpersonal difficulties. In the East personal integrity is based on one's ability to contribute to the harmony of the community, and not on individual honesty. When two Orientals do have a relationship of openness and frankness they become friends for life. Such a relationship cannot begin and end in an experimental situation or the environment of a temporary group.

Fourth, T group participants are assumed to feel that they can control the situation in which they find themselves. Americans tend to see themselves in this sort of active relationship with their environment, but many non-Americans have a more passive feeling and are less likely to feel able to influence what takes place in any given social situation in which they find themselves.

Finally, the T group places considerable value on personal change. Americans are often said to value change for its own sake, and the values of the T group are consistent with that. It is an orientation which is likely to be foreign to persons from tradition-oriented cultures, cultures in which what has gone before is presumed to be superior to that which is new and different.

We have discussed at some length the culture-bound aspects of the sensitivity training group in order to make clear what presumptions the format makes about the values and modes of behavior of its participants. Clearly a person who is not able to act like an American, whether he is one or not, will have difficulty participating in a T group and learning from the group those things which it is designed to teach.

The Intercultural Communications Workshop

An intercultural communications workshop includes participants from more than one culture. Its goal is to increase mutual awareness among the participants of the role their cultural backgrounds play in influencing their values, their behavior, and their perceptions of the world around them.

This awareness emerges from the interactions of the group members with one another as they explore the implications of their behavior in programmed exercises or discuss subjects in which culture-based values are most clearly reflected. These are more often than not the common social experiences which all human beings share (family relationships, education, friendship patterns, and relationships between males and females and between young people and older people).

It is the job of the workshop leader to help the participants understand how cultural differences (as well as the personality differences on which a T group focuses) erect barriers

between individuals. It is the dual aim of the workshop 1) to draw out and interpret these differences in a way which will increase awareness of their significance and 2) to establish the conditions in which the participants can experience a breaking through of these barriers.

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A discussion oriented toward culture-based values and behavior, while closely related to personal experiences and problems, is generally far less intensive than is the discussion of the immediate personal interactions which take place in a T group. But the fact that it is not as intensive or emotionally involving as a T group does not mean that a workshop is impersonal or "intellectual." One of the measures of the success of a workshop is the degree to which participants are able to share their feelings about and their experiences within the culture patterns of their own country. This goes for Americans as well as non-Americans. The American's very ability to be open and self-revealing is a behavior characteristic based on cultural values and assumptions about man and society which he rarely explores.

Like the T group, the workshop fosters the development of an atmosphere of trust—not as a framework for self-confrontation but as a context within which the group can probe the delicate sensitivities of cultural identity without causing pain.

Guided by an experienced leader a workshop can provide a great deal of very substantive learning in addition to the basic intercultural communications experience. It may be about the impact on society of rapid technological change; differing responses to authority; "individualism" and "communalism"; patterns of leadership behavior; tradition vs. modernity; the place of efficiency in a hierarchy of values, as well as variations in the basic social experience (mentioned above). From an intercultural communications workshop a participant can learn about the subject of culture generally, about the cultures represented in the group, and about the problems of communication which exist when members of differing cultures come together. Perhaps most important, he can learn about himself, since the encounter with contrasting value and behavior systems will normally illuminate his own with marked effect.

Put together, this learning can be very helpful in overcoming some of the difficulties which are often experienced in understanding and dealing with people from differing cultural backgrounds.

SOME CONTRASTS BETWEEN SENSITIVITY TRAINING GROUPS AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS WORKSHOPS

Sensitivity Training Group		Intercultural Communications Workshops
	PURPOSE	
Personal change, or at least awareness of possibilities for personal change; the development of human relations skills in dealing with oneself and others.		Increased awareness of the cultural influences on human values and behavior; the experience of breaking through cultural barriers to communications and interpersonal relations.
	METHODS	
	1. Structure	
Completely unstructured, except as the group structures itself.		Agenda may be used or subjects for discussion consciously introduced from time to time.
	2. Trainer Role	
Influencing the level of discussion—keeping it from being "intellectual" or "abstract"—but not the subject; interpreting interactions occurring within the group.		Influencing the subject of discussion—keeping it relevant to cultural differences—as well as the level; pointing out the impact on the individual's feelings of his cultural background.
	3. Source of Material for Discussion	
"Here and now", or what takes place among the participants themselves.		"There and then" (recollected experiences and feelings) as well as "here and now".
	4. Participation	
Norms set by the group with individuals free to withdraw.		Norms set by the trainer who seeks ultimately to get everyone involved.
	DYNAMICS	
Very intense involvement, with considerable "feedback" to each participant about his personality and behavior.		Moderately intense involvement, with discussion focused more on cultural and less on personal aspects of behavior.

ISSUES IN HUMAN RELATIONS TRAINING WITH FOREIGN STUDENTS

Persons who see human relations training programs of one type or another as useful in promoting meaningful contacts between foreign and American students face a number of issues, including three we will discuss here: What are appropriate purposes of the human relations training programs? How should the programs be designed? Where can qualified personnel to conduct them be found?

Purposes

We have already mentioned the basic difference in purpose between a sensitivity training group and an intercultural communications workshop. The former aims at facilitating personal change or growth, and the latter at increasing awareness of cultural differences and their effects. Both are valid educational purposes. Which is chosen for programs involving foreign students depends on a variety of factors, including basic assumptions about the role of foreign students on a given campus; the interests and desires of the students themselves; the length of time the foreign students have been in the United States; and their cultural backgrounds.

If the foreign students on a given campus are supposed to be present at least partially for the purpose of increasing the American students' understanding of other cultures, a program which makes use of cultural differences for teaching, as an intercultural communications workshop does, is a more logical one to conduct. It is also more logical where the desire or need of the foreign student participant is, without discarding his own cultural identity, to break through the barrier of impersonality and unconcern which seems to many to dominate the American environment. If foreign students are not considered "special" in any respect, a program which ignores cultural differences (by assuming that all participants are acting on the basis of a particular cultural background), as a T group does, is appropriate.

The foreign students on a given campus may or may not be interested in any particular kind of human relations training program. Their desires should be taken into account when a human relations training program in which they will be invited to participate is under consideration, because voluntary participation in such a program is far more desirable than participation under any kind of compulsion.

The longer a foreign student has been in the United States, the more likely is he to be able to comprehend what is happening in a T group and to be able to participate in it. This is because he is more likely than a recent arrival to have developed an "American personality," a personality which enables him to interact reasonably well (although seldom satisfactorily to him personally, it seems) with Americans on the Americans' terms. The student who has not developed this second personality is very likely to walk out of a T group or withdraw into the role of a detached, non-participating observer.

None of this is to say that foreign students who have been in the United States for a considerable period of time cannot enjoy and learn from an intercultural communications workshop. Such students, who may find the intensive experience of a T group of interest to them, may also find workshops quite rewarding.

Design

How a human relations training program should be designed depends, of course, on its purposes and on the nature of its participants. These we have just discussed and they should

be taken into account when choosing a design.

In this section we will indicate some of the aspects of program design which distinguish a sensitivity training group (for Americans and those with "American personalities") from an intercultural communications workshop (for a multi-cultural group).

In a sense it can be said that a T group has no ostensible design, or that its design is no design. A group of participants with a trainer can merely sit down and begin, building on and learning from whatever happens. Thus T groups are said to be "unstructured," by which is meant lacking in conventional agenda.

An intercultural communications workshop, by contrast, has a considerable amount of structure. There are broad topics or at least subject-matter areas for conversation. The trainer will supply activities ("exercises") designed to elicit discussion of certain subjects, and will not allow the discussion to assume the ambiguousness and deep emotional involvement which can make a T group personally threatening. He will guide the discussion, in as subtle a way as he can, toward consideration of subjects which reflect cultural background. The trainers in both T groups and workshops will encourage the expression of feelings rather than intellectualizations. Instead, however, of fostering the confrontation of expressed feelings, as the T group trainer generally will, the workshop trainer simply establishes the expression of feelings as a norm which then slowly draws the participants, as a group or in pairs, closer together, thereby creating an atmosphere of trust in which barriers to communication may be lowered. The workshop trainer will be very concerned with drawing everyone into the discussion in some way.

During the discussion, if an atmosphere of trust is successfully created, the participants usually begin to express their generalized feelings about the countries and cultures of the other members of the group. The foreign participants give some of their feelings about America and Americans, while the American participants give some of their views of foreign students or their experiences with people from a specific country. Much confusion, frustration and misunderstanding usually become evident in such a discussion. The expression of these feelings is generally helpful for the participants, as is the opportunity the workshop provides for adjusting misconceptions.

Choosing a Trainer

Choosing a trainer (or leader) for a human relations training program of any kind is extremely difficult. There are no commonly accepted criteria for measuring a trainer's competence, nor is there any accrediting organization to which to refer.

There are some places to which one can turn for help. Persons trained under the auspices of the National Training Laboratories (NTL) are often considered to be well qualified to conduct T groups, although there are those who have a less positive opinion of the NTL. Many universities have developed or are now developing their own human relations training programs either as independent entities or as adjuncts of departments of organizational behavior, business, or social psychology. (It is now common for participation in a T group to be required of students--including foreign students—in the latter fields.) Thus there are many organizations and people with experience of some kind in conducting human relations training programs.

We wish to stress two points here. First, one who would sponsor a human relations training program including foreign students should decide what kind of program he considers appropriate (taking into account some of the factors we have described in earlier parts of

this report). Then he should locate an organization or individual purporting to conduct such programs and either participate in one or get a report on one from someone on whom he can rely. In any event, a personal interview with anyone engaged to conduct a T group is a necessity. It should be kept in mind that an evaluation of the competence of a trainer, especially that of a T group trainer, is an exceedingly subjective thing.

Secondly, there is considerable indication that persons who have been trained in T groups are seldom able to conduct a satisfactory intercultural communications workshop. Their training and experience have taught them to value highly and pursue relentlessly the aims and methods of sensitivity training. They are often unable to recognize the existence or effects of cultural differences among human beings, since the aims and methods of sensitivity training are culture-bound. Furthermore, they often seem to have been captured by the mystique or sense of mission which frequently surrounds practitioners of T-grouping, with the result that they not only fail to recognize cultural differences, but they deny their existence. In a program which includes foreign students, this can be a serious deficiency.

CONCLUSION

There are a variety of human relations training programs, and one should be clear which kind he has in mind when he is considering their appropriateness for foreign students. Sensitivity training takes no special notice of cultural differences and is thus not of special relevance to those concerned with foreign students. This is not to say that foreign students should be discouraged from participating in sensitivity training programs to which they happen to have access. Like other potential participants, they are generally able to decide for themselves whether such a program would be interesting to them. And, like other potential participants, they should be provided beforehand with adequate information about the program's purposes and methods and they should be screened to eliminate those with psychological problems which might be aggravated by the stress of the program. They should also be allowed the opportunity to meet with the trainer to clarify their understanding of what a T group entails. A Foreign Student Adviser who has himself participated in a T group is far better equipped than one who has not to describe the format to an interested foreign student.

The intercultural communications workshop, on the other hand, is a program designed to extract learning for both foreign and American students from the interaction of the two groups. As a program using cultural differences for learning, the workshop can appropriately be sponsored by persons who are responsible for foreign students and concerned about their interaction with their American peers.

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